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THE RED KNIGHT'S GAMBIT

No piece on the chessboard is more useful than an astutely employed knight, the only piece that jumps; and no knight's move is more effective than a successful fork — in which a knight unexpectedly jumps to a new square, often taking a pawn in the process, suddenly and simultaneously threatening two or more valuable pieces an opponent is loathe to lose, forcing that opponent into an unpalatable, reactive choice.

Confronted with a fork, bad chess players — the easily beaten ones who generally lose — focus primarily on their next move, on how to extricate themselves from their immediate problem or threat. Players who consistently win never make any move, least of all one reactive to an unwelcome development, without first carefully weighing how each alternative is likely to affect their board position five, 10, or even more moves later.

The Soviets are avid chess players, often very good ones. In political terms, their Aug. 30 arrest of Nicholas Daniloff was a neat knight's gambit, a classic fork play. In responding so far, the United States has made the classic error just described — focusing on its immediate next move, not on its future board position, thus giving the Soviets the initiative and edge they sought and can now exploit. To the Soviets, furthermore, Mr. Daniloff was an ideal pawn to take in essaying this gambit.

The Soviets dislike foreign journalists and consider all of them at least potential spies — as many, if not most, Soviet journalists serving abroad generally are. A free press, as we know it, simply does not exist in the Soviet Union, where information is a tightly controlled state monopoly and anyone who tries to circumvent or break that monopoly is considered an enemy of the state.

Nicholas Daniloff is the walking embodiment of the kind of foreign journalist the Soviets like least. He is independent, courageous, knowledgeable, and experienced; indeed, his arrest came only days before he was scheduled to leave the Soviet Union at the end of his second five-year tour as a correspondent there. The grandson of a czarist general and descendant of a 19th-century Decembrist revolutionary, his Russian is fluent, hence he can converse easily with Soviet citizens and needs no Soviet-supplied guide or interpreter to help him move about, while keeping tabs on where he goes and who he sees.

The Soviets, furthermore, have a long memory for what they consider affronts. In September 1983, at the unprecedented Moscow press conference extravaganza held to justify the Soviet downing of Korean Airlines Flight 007 and expound what is

still the official propaganda line on that event, it was Nick Daniloff who asked the toughest, most awkward questions — while Soviet television cameras were on. In 1984, *U.S. News & World Report* published an article by him that was highly critical of the KGB. In April 1986, at another Moscow press conference — convened to display the former head of Radio Liberty's Russian service, who had defected to the U.S.S.R. — he publicly criticized the Soviets, to loud applause from the floor, for a personal and anti-Semitic attack on the *Philadelphia Inquirer's* Moscow bureau chief, Don Kimelman, which could not have been published (in *Sovetskaya Rossiya*) without official endorsement or instigation.

Such actions cannot have endeared Mr. Daniloff to the Soviets. At least some in the KGB were doubtless as loathe to see him leave the U.S.S.R. unchastised, in 1986, as POV (air defense) commanders had been to let KAL 007 exit Soviet airspace unscathed in 1983. Indeed, the KGB had twice before tried to entrap Mr. Daniloff, unsuccessfully.

He did not bite at a rather clumsy mail provocation, but the other attempt was potentially more serious. In 1984, after Mr. Daniloff's KGB critique was published, the KGB callously tried to cast a retired genetics professor in Moscow as "Mischa" — Dr. David Goldfarb, a diabetic who had an exit-visa application pending, who badly needed medical attention abroad, and whom the KGB knew Mr. Daniloff liked and trusted.

This effort was aborted by Dr. Goldfarb's brave refusal to cooperate in the frameup — at the price of his exit visa and his now rapidly deteriorating health.

When KGB staff officer Gennadi Zakharov, working under U.N. Secretariat cover without diplomatic immunity, was arrested *in flagrante* by the FBI on Aug. 23, Mr. Daniloff — in Soviet eyes, and not just the KGB's — must have seemed the ideal American in Moscow, also without diplomatic immunity, to grab in retaliation, particularly since framing and arresting him enabled the Soviets to send several different messages simultaneously to several key audiences in making their knight's gambit fork against the United States on the superpower chessboard.

The KGB may well have wanted to remind Soviet citizens how dangerous it could be to have contacts with foreign journalists; but in this sphere, the Soviets' primary target audience was foreign journalists themselves, particularly American ones.

As the KGB well knows, fear is a powerful motive; so, too, is ambition, and prudential, self-rationalized, self-censorship is the most effective censorship of all. The KGB and its Soviet Politburo masters want all foreign and particularly American journalists, along with their newspa-

pers, wire services, magazines, and networks — to understand clearly that those who are cooperatively helpful will get the interviews, access, and other forms of assistance that enhance their careers and competitive edge, while those who refuse to toe the Soviet line — who cause trouble by being critical or asking awkward questions — will have both professional and personal reasons to regret doing so. The role models the Soviets want American

journalists to employ while concentrating professionally on the Soviet Union are John Reed, Walter Duranty, Harrison Salisbury, and even Seymour Hersh — not Nicholas Daniloff.

In the intelligence sphere, the Soviets want much more than a mere bargaining chip for Mr. Zakharov. They want to extend a permanent mantle of protection over their large and steadily increasing number of

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"illegals" in the United States — Soviet citizens without diplomatic status or immunity who under all manner of covers are energetically engaged in intelligence missions, particularly in the high-tech field.

In this complex game, Mr. Daniloff — to the Soviets — is but a symbolic pawn. Through his arrest they are conveying the message that every non-official American in the

Soviet Union, including every American journalist, is perpetually hostage to the way Soviet intelligence illegals are treated in the United States.

The Soviets are also trying to get us to accept, in practice, their concept of equivalence between American journalists in the U.S.S.R. and Soviet citizens conducting espionage in the United States.

Here, our actions are far more important to the Soviets than our words. Every aspect of their handling of Mr. Daniloff has been and will be artfully designed to create, then stress parallels to Mr. Zakharov and induce us to accept equivalent treatment of these cases in a precedent-setting way — no matter how stridently we deny, at how high a level, that this is what we are doing.

Equivalence between American journalists and Soviet intelligence officers, furthermore, is not the only concept the Soviets are trying to pressure us into accepting through their treatment of Nicholas Daniloff. The Soviets have always contended that any attempt to resist or thwart Soviet aggression or depredations, including espionage, is "provocative," and provocation should, of course, always be avoided in the interests of good relations and world peace.

Consequently, so this argument runs, the primary blame for the current situation rests not with the Soviets for arresting Mr. Daniloff but, instead, with the American officials who approved the "provocative" prior arrest of Mr. Zakharov, at such a politically inopportune time.

Unfortunately, this is a theme that all too many Americans are willing to accept, play, and amplify — in the media and even in the government itself. For the Soviets, this is pure catnip, since their real, long-term objective in peddling these themes of equivalence and provocation is to extend a multilayered mantle of protection over their illegals in the United States — a mantle under which these intelligence operatives can beaver away with virtual *de facto* impunity.

In chess, a knight's gambit is most likely to be successful when the opponent against whom it is employed gets so mesmerized by a dramatic immediate threat that said opponent ignores less obvious challenges

whose subsequent exploitation does even greater damage.

That is precisely the Soviet trap into which the United States seems bent on falling. In its eagerness to protect the Shultz-Shevardnadze conversations and, above all, the summit planning they were to address — or even such exchanges as the "town meeting" in Riga sponsored by the Chautauqua Institution — the Reagan administration did far more than avert its eyes from the real challenges the Soviets have posed in their treatment of Nicholas Daniloff, or the dangers inherent in the precedents set by the administration's actions in response to these challenges.

When to protect their long-term intelligence interests, the Soviets went eyeball-to-eyeball with the Reagan administration in the wake of Mr. Zakharov's arrest. President Reagan and his advisers not only blinked — they ducked.

This flinching may have gotten Nicholas Daniloff out of prison, and enabled the Chautauqua delegation to leave for its Riga town meeting on schedule, but only at a high price to longer-term U.S. interests — including that of protecting American journalists working in the Soviet Union, and the chances of a successful summit.

Putting ourselves on the slippery slope of equivalence to solve the immediate problem of Mr. Daniloff's imprisonment will not protect American journalists in the future. Quite the reverse, since despite our verbal outcry, our actions indicate that in arresting a Mr. Daniloff, the Soviets run no risk of disrupting anything of consequence to them, such as wheat deals or summit negotiations. Mr. Daniloff may have been the first item on the Shultz-Shevardnadze agenda, but Soviet stonewalling on the Daniloff case did not keep the other items from being addressed.

In summit discussions, we seem to have forgotten the lessons of 1972 — when our mining of Haiphong Harbor and heavy attacks on the U.S.S.R.'s ally, North Vietnam, caused no hitch in preparations for a summit the Soviets wanted to hold. (Similarly, in 1960, the U-2 incident was the occasion, not the cause, of Nikita Khrushchev's scrubbing a summit he no longer wanted.)

The Soviets respect strength and vigorous defense of our legitimate interests — not timorous diffidence or bluster not backed by action which they construe as weakness. Furthermore, as anyone who has ever bought or sold a used car ought to know, a transparently eager negotiator is seldom a successful one.

Since the 1917 revolution, the Soviets have always considered their

relations with us, and with all non-Communist nations, as fundamentally adversarial. They view each concrete situation or exchange in that basic, zero-sum context.

Through our inept handling of their knight's gambit on Mr. Daniloff, we have lost the initiative in this particular exchange, worsened our board position, and have been made to look ridiculous.

In life, as in chess, particularly when contending with a relentless opponent, that combination — if no soon altered — can easily prove disastrous.

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